



Georgia [Republic] and NATO Enlargement: Issues and Implications

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Summary

This report examines the aspirations of Georgia [Republic] to become a member of NATO. Issues related to Georgia's reform progress, Georgia-Russia relations, and U.S. policy are examined.

This report may be updated. Related products include CRS Report RL34701, *NATO Enlargement: Albania, Croatia, and Possible Future Candidates*, by Vincent Morelli et al.

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Background

Georgia joined NATO's Partnership for Peace (PFP) program in 1994.¹ At the NATO Summit in Prague in November 2002, Georgia declared that it aspired to eventual NATO membership and sought to intensify ties with NATO through an Individual Partnership Action Plan (IPAP) to increase the interoperability and capability of its military forces. After Georgia's "rose revolution" of late 2003 brought a new reformist government to power, Georgia placed top priority on integration with Western institutions, including NATO and the European Union (EU). During the presidential election campaign in late 2003, candidate Mikheil Saakashvili ran on a platform that included a pledge to work toward NATO membership. Georgia began sending troops to assist NATO forces in Kosovo in 1999, began hosting multinational PFP military training exercises in 2001, and pledged to send troops to assist the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan. In late 2004, Georgia concluded an IPAP with NATO, which allowed the Alliance to provide more assistance on domestic reforms, including defense institutional and policy reforms and political reforms. After extensive public debate, the Georgian government approved a national security concept in late 2005 that committed the country to carry out the reforms outlined by the IPAP.²

During the first two-year period of the IPAP covering 2005-2006, NATO viewed Georgia generally as adequately satisfying reform priorities and time-lines. Under NATO guidelines, Georgia's preparations for Alliance membership include its progress in democratizing, developing a market economy with social welfare guarantees, and creating a professional military that contributes to Euro-Atlantic security. Other criteria include the resolution of internal separatist conflicts and international disputes. The latter may include weighing geo-strategic concerns, including good-neighborly relations with Russia.³

Although some Alliance members initially may have been more confident than others that Georgia had made adequate progress, the members came to a consensus in September 2006 to offer Georgia an "Intensified Dialogue" of stepped-up consultations to assist the country in furthering its aspirations for Alliance membership.

Progress and Challenges Before the August 2008 Russia-Georgia Conflict

Democratization and Economic Reform Challenges

In early November 2007, the Georgian government forcibly suppressed demonstrations, closed some media, and declared emergency rule.⁴ Some Alliance members raised concerns about

¹ In 1994, Georgia's then-President Eduard Shevardnadze stated that he hoped that Russia would cooperate with NATO to enhance international security. *BBC Monitoring Service: Former USSR*, January 19, 1994; *Reuters*, March 23, 1994.

² Open Source Center. *Central Eurasia: Daily Report* (hereafter *CEDR*), October 5, 2005, Doc. No. CEP-20003.

³ NATO. *Study on NATO Enlargement*, September 1995.

⁴ For background, see CRS Report RS22794, *Georgia's January 2008 Presidential Election: Outcome and Implications*, by Jim Nichol.

Georgia's apparently faltering democratization and the suitability of inviting it to participate in a MAP at the upcoming NATO summit in Bucharest in April 2008.⁵ Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer criticized the imposition of emergency rule and the closure of media outlets by the government in Georgia as "not in line with Euro-Atlantic values."⁶ Domestic and international criticism may have helped convince President Saakashvili to admit that his government appeared non-responsive to the concerns of many citizens, and to resign and seek re-election by pledging reforms. Following Saakashvili's re-election in early 2008, NATO's press spokesman James Appathurai "welcomed" the international monitors' assessments that the election reflected the free choice of the voters, and stated that "NATO will continue to deepen its intensified dialogue with Georgia, and support further efforts to meet Euro-Atlantic standards."⁷

On economic guidelines for attaining NATO membership, Georgia has made progress in creating a free market economy, resulting in GDP growth of 10% in 2007 (*CIA World Factbook*), despite trade restrictions imposed by Russia. The high level of lingering poverty was a contributing factor in the civil unrest in late 2007. Although the Saakashvili government has made some progress in combating corruption, the World Bank stresses that corruption still seriously retards good governance.⁸ In the presidential election campaign in late 2007, Saakashvili pledged added efforts to combat poverty and corruption. Economic growth continued during the first half of 2008, but was slowed in the aftermath of the August 2008 Russia-Georgia conflict (see below).

The Evolution of Defense Reforms

The Georgian military has undertaken major efforts to re-equip its armed forces with Western-made or upgraded conventional weapons, armor, aviation, and electronic equipment, with stated objectives that include increasing the military's interoperability with NATO forces and contributing to NATO collective security and operations. The Georgian Defense Ministry's 2007 *Strategic Defense Review* stated that the country was addressing capability deficiencies in military intelligence, air and maritime defense, joint force interoperability, special forces (including to support ISAF), and combat service support. Illustrative of reform progress, interior ministry troops were absorbed into the armed forces in 2004 and the General Staff command system began to transition to a joint command staff in 2007. The *Strategic Defense Review* suggested that Georgia eventually might be able to contribute to NATO by developing a niche capability in mountain combat training.⁹

To enhance democratic civil-military relations, a civilian defense minister was appointed in 2004 to head a ministry increasingly staffed by civilians. Coordination between security-related ministries increased. The government maintains that the defense budget is transparent and is scrutinized by the Committee on Defense and Security in the legislature. The defense ministry states that it consults with an advisory Civil Council, composed of civilian experts, on issues of defense policy, human rights of members of the armed forces, and budget expenditures. Some

⁵ Financial Times, January 25, 2008, p. 6.

⁶ NATO. Press Release. Statement by the Secretary General on the Situation in Georgia, November 8, 2007.

⁷ NATO. Press Release. NATO Spokesman's Response to the Presidential Elections in Georgia, January 8, 2008. According to a plebiscite held at the same time as the election, about 77% of Georgia's citizens who voted answered affirmatively that the country should join NATO.

⁸ The World Bank. Governance Matters 2007: Country Data Reports.

⁹ ITAR-TASS, October 25, 2007; January 20, 2008; CEDR, January 18, 2008, Doc. No. CEP-950314; CEDR, September 12, 2007, Doc. No. CEP-950248; Strategic Defense Review, p. 83.

critics have maintained that legislative oversight remains inadequate. In January 2008, NATO assessed positively Georgia's progress on expanded IPAP goals covering 2007-2008.¹⁰

The April 2008 NATO Summit

At a meeting with NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer on February 14, 2008, the head of Georgia's mission to NATO handed him a note from President Saakashvili formally requesting the Alliance to invite Georgia to participate in a MAP at the upcoming NATO summit in Bucharest in April 2008. The issue was a matter of contention at the summit. Although Georgia was not offered a MAP, the Alliance pledged that Georgia would eventually become a member of NATO. Some observers in Georgia and the west argued that NATO's failure to offer Georgia a MAP emboldened Russia's aggressiveness toward Georgia and may have been an enabling factor in Russia's August 2008 invasion of Georgia (see below). Others consider that NATO's pledge that Georgia eventually would become a member, as well as Georgia's ongoing movement toward integration with the west, spurred Russian aggression. Saakashvili has argued that Russia wanted to crush Georgia's independence and end its bid to join NATO.

The August 2008 Russia-Georgia Conflict And Its Aftermath

NATO condemned Russia's August 2008 military incursion into Georgia as disproportionate and the subsequent recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia's independence as violating Georgia's territorial integrity.¹¹ The alliance announced on August 19 that it was temporarily suspending meetings of the NATO-Russia Council and that it was forming a NATO-Georgia Commission to discuss Georgia's post-conflict democratic, economic, and defense needs.¹² Russia responded by suspending most cooperation with NATO, although Russia's emissary to NATO stated on September 3 that Russia would continue to work with NATO on plans for the trans-shipment of supplies to Afghanistan.¹³

The inaugural meeting of the NATO-Georgia Commission was held in Tbilisi on September 15 as part of a visit by the North Atlantic Council ambassadors and Secretary-General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer. A communique adopted at the inaugural meeting reaffirmed NATO's commitment to Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity, raised concerns about Russia's "disproportionate" military actions against Georgia, and condemned Russia's recognition of the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The ambassadors stressed that NATO would continue to assist Georgia in carrying out the reform program set forth in Georgia's IPAP with NATO. In a separate statement, de Hoop Scheffer reportedly indicated that it might prove difficult to resume meetings of the NATO-Russia Council until Russia drew down the number of troops in South Ossetia and Abkhazia to pre-conflict numbers.¹⁴ On September 18-19, a meeting of NATO defense ministers

¹⁰ Rustavi Television, January 31, 2008.

¹¹ For background on the conflict, see CRS Report RL34618, *Russia-Georgia Conflict in August 2008: Context and Implications for U.S. Interests*, by Jim Nichol.

¹² NATO. Statement: Meeting of the North Atlantic Council at the level of Foreign Ministers held at NATO Headquarters, Brussels, August 19, 2008.

¹³ "Envoy Says Russia to Continue Cooperation with NATO on Afghanistan," *BBC Monitoring International Reports*, September 3, 2008.

¹⁴ NATO. NATO-Georgia Joint Press Statement on the Occasion of the North Atlantic Council Visit to Georgia and the Inaugural Meeting of the NATO-Georgia Commission, September 15, 2008; James Blitz, "NATO Head Attacks EU's Georgia Deal," *Financial Times*, September 14, 2008.

further discussed Georgia's rebuilding needs and the implications of Russia's actions for Euro-Atlantic security. While the defense ministers were meeting, Russian President Medvedev accused NATO of "provoking" the August Russia-Georgia conflict rather than guaranteeing peace.¹⁵ During an October 2008 meeting of the NATO-Georgia Commission, cooperation in the monitoring of Georgian airspace was discussed.

At the December 2008 NATO foreign ministerial meeting, the issue of offering a MAP to Georgia was sidestepped and the members instead offered an Annual National Program of stepped-up assistance to help Georgia move toward eventual NATO membership. A session of the NATO-Georgia Commission also was held, where the foreign ministers assured Georgia that NATO would provide "further assistance to Georgia in implementing needed reforms as it progresses towards NATO membership." The foreign ministers stated that they were closely watching Georgia's democratic reform progress. In the security realm, they called for Georgia to undertake a "lessons-learned process from the recent conflict," and to incorporate the lessons into a planned "review of security documents." They also urged Georgia to continue reforms in military personnel management, in the transparency of the defense budget, and in the interoperability of its forces with NATO forces. They announced that NATO would increase staffing at its liaison office in Tbilisi.¹⁶

At the February 20, 2009, meeting of the NATO-Georgia commission, NATO and Georgian defense ministers discussed recovery assistance to Georgia and Russia's construction of military bases in the breakaway regions. Addressing an associated meeting of NATO defense ministers, Secretary-General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer stated that "we have seen [Russia's] recognition of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. We see [Russia's] intention of establishing bases there.... And it is crystal clear that we do not agree with Russia there.... We should use the NATO-Russia Council ... to discuss these things where we fundamentally disagree."¹⁷

At the NATO foreign ministers' meeting on March 5, 2009, the Alliance agreed to reopen NATO-Russia Council talks, although the communique stressed that the forum would be used to press Russia to abide by the Russia-Georgia ceasefire accords and to rescind its diplomatic recognition and basing arrangements with Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Lithuania's foreign minister reportedly argued that the renewal of NATO-Russia Council meetings was premature because Russian behavior had not adequately changed, but conceded that, rather than blocking an Alliance consensus, Lithuania would call for such meetings to address issues of Georgia's territorial integrity.¹⁸ At a meeting of the NATO-Georgia Commission the same day, the Alliance discussed progress in developing a Annual National Program for Georgia.

Progress in Meeting NATO Guidelines

After the Russia-Georgia conflict, an IPAP team reportedly provided a positive assessment during a visit to Georgia in October 2008.¹⁹ In early 2009, Georgia was changing its defense planning

¹⁵ Prashant Rao, "NATO Mulls Response as Russia Accuses it over Georgia," *Agence France-Presse*, September 19, 2008; "Medvedev Accuses NATO of Provoking Georgia War," *Agence France-Presse*, September 19, 2008.

¹⁶ NATO. Chairman's Statement: Meeting of the NATO-Georgia Commission at the level of Foreign Ministers, Press Release (2008)154, December 3, 2008.

¹⁷ "NATO Ministers Seek To Keep Door Open to Ukraine, Georgia," *Radio Free Europe*, February 20, 2009.

¹⁸ Lithuanian News Agency – ELTA, March 5, 2009.

¹⁹ Nino Gogochishvili, "IPAP Assessment Team Visited Georgia," *Defense Today*, Georgian Ministry of Defense, (continued...)

cycle to bring it into synchrony with NATO's new Annual National Program. Defense Minister David Sikharulidze reportedly stated that a new defense plan—"Minister's Vision 2009"—would stress upgrading communications, the air force and air defense, military intelligence, and education, and the continuation of military cooperation with the United States. Problems of command (including coordination between the Joint Staff and the Ministry of Defense), planning, and budgeting would be addressed. Military preparedness, he stated, would reflect "experience gained during Russia's aggression," including "the need for protecting Georgia against possible military aggression and other national security tasks." The defense plan is envisaged to become part of a revised *Strategic Defense Review*.²⁰ As stressed by many observers, Russia's incursion into Georgia and its construction of bases in the breakaway regions has necessitated both a fundamental shift in Georgia's defense strategy to accentuate territorial defense and at least partial changes in the assistance provided by NATO allies.²¹

Other military reforms have included improved living conditions, pay, and social benefits, and plans to fully replace conscription after 2009 with voluntary enlistment contracts. These improvements have increased the retention rate for officers and specialists who had received NATO and other Western training. In late 2007, Georgian officials announced that the military would add a fifth brigade, boosting the total number of troops from 28,000 to 32,000, and would build a new military base to enhance "integration into NATO and ... the country's defense capability." The military budget for 2008 was about \$1.1 billion, compared to about \$570 million the previous year, and amounted to about 7.6% of GDP.²² Some in Georgia criticized the increases in troops and spending as not in accordance with NATO guidelines for capabilities or military budgets.²³ In the wake of the Russia-Georgia conflict and the global economic crisis, however, Georgia announced that it was reducing its defense budget to about \$680 million and the number of armed forces personnel.²⁴

In regard to other guidelines for NATO membership, Saakashvili has pledged additional democratization efforts. The economy declined in the wake of the Russia-Georgia conflict and the onset of the global economic crisis, but economic problems were ameliorated somewhat by international aid pledges for Georgia's rebuilding.

Georgia announced just before the August 2008 Russia-Georgia conflict that it planned to send 400 troops to support ISAF, but in October 2008 it stated that the numbers would be lower in the wake of the conflict. Reportedly, about 100 troops may be deployed to support ISAF. Georgia also has offered to facilitate the shipment of equipment in the wake of Kyrgyzstan's plans to close

(...continued)

October 2008.

²⁰ Minister's Vision 2009, Georgian Ministry of Defense, February 17, 2009, at <http://www.mod.gov.ge/?l=E&m=3&sm=2>; David J. Smith, "Georgian Armed Forces Moving Forward," *Georgian Daily*, February 24, 2009; *CEDR*, February 17, 2009, Doc. No. CEP-950305; February 9, 2009, Doc. No. CEP-950162; February 3, 2009, Doc. No. CEP-950274.

²¹ As argued by Col. Jon. Chicky, "the reconstitution of the Georgian armed forces' operational and tactical capabilities is the first priority in preserving Georgia's sovereignty and its democratic, Euro-Atlantic orientation." *The Russian-Georgian War: Political and Military Implications for U.S. Policy*, Central Asia-Caucasus Institute, February 2009.

²² *The Military Balance*, February 1, 2009.

²³ *CEDR*, September 10, 2007, Doc. No. CEP-950289. The Strategic Defense Review has called for reducing the armed forces to about 26,000 personnel by 2009 and to about 19,000 by the end of 2015 (pp. 85, 88).

²⁴ One Georgian defense analyst estimated the damage to the military as a result of the August 2008 conflict at about \$360 million. *CEDR*, January 5, 2009, Doc. No. CEP-950121.

the U.S. airbase supporting coalition operations in Afghanistan. Georgian Defense Minister Sikharulidze stated in February 2009 that Georgia previously had agreed to facilitate trans-shipments of materiel to Afghanistan “within the framework of cooperation with NATO,” and that “we once again confirm these commitments.”²⁵

Implications for Georgia

Most Georgians have appeared to support NATO membership. According to a plebiscite held at the same time as the January 2008 presidential election, 77% of Georgian citizens who voted answered affirmatively that Georgia should join NATO. The majority of opposition parties also supports Georgia’s eventual accession to NATO. Among those opposing further Georgian moves toward Alliance membership, Irina Sarishvili (who ran as a losing candidate in the January 2008 presidential election) attempted to gain signatures before the August conflict for a voter referendum on proclaiming Georgia a neutral country. She warned that Russia would retaliate against Georgian membership in NATO by never permitting Georgia to peacefully regain authority over Abkhazia and South Ossetia.²⁶ More recently, Labor Party leader Shalva Natelashvili has called for Georgia to proclaim itself a non-aligned state. Some Georgians oppose joining NATO because they allege that the Alliance will condition membership on Georgia accepting the independence of the separatist regions.²⁷

There are contending views within Georgia about whether the August conflict hurt or improved Georgia’s progress toward NATO membership. After the signing of the U.S.-Georgia Charter in January 2009 (see below), Georgian military analyst Irakli Sesiashvili claimed that “Georgia’s prospects for joining NATO have significantly improved thanks to the signing of this charter.... After the USA commits to ensuring our country’s security and tries to settle relations with Russia at the political level, it [Georgia] will very quickly meet the relevant standards.... In such a situation, Europe will simply not be able to say no to Georgia joining NATO.”²⁸ On February 3, 2009, Defense Minister Sikharulidze appeared to reflect optimism about Georgia’s NATO prospects when he stated that Georgia “will continue the course of complete integration into NATO.”²⁹ Perhaps reflecting less optimism, President Saakashvili on February 18 appeared to voice frustration with the slow process of accession to NATO membership when he reportedly stated that “EU membership is more important to us than integration into NATO.”³⁰ Georgian military analyst Giorgi Tavdgiridze has raised concerns that Georgia’s goal of having interoperable forces with NATO forces has become more difficult since the Russia-Georgia conflict, because some European countries are reluctant to supply NATO-caliber weapons to Georgia for fear of offending Russia.³¹

²⁵ CEDR, February 20, 2009, Doc. No. CEP-950075.

²⁶ CEDR, January 24, 2008, Doc. No. CEP-358004; BBC Monitoring, January 2, 2008; Interfax, January 15, 2008.

²⁷ CEDR, December 19, 2006, Doc. No. CEP-21002.

²⁸ CEDR, January 15, 2009, Doc. No. CEP-950242.

²⁹ CEDR, February 3, 2009, Doc. No. CEP-950050.

³⁰ CEDR, February 23, 2009, Doc. No. CEP-3950125. According to one Georgian analyst, “the prospect of NATO [membership for Georgia] has become distant.... Priorities are being redefined [by the Saakashvili government] and they want this to seem to be the result of Georgian policy rather than that of the West.” Another analyst claimed that NATO’s inaction during the Russia-Georgia conflict had spurred a re-evaluation of the benefits of attempting to join the Alliance.

³¹ CEDR, February 9, 2009, Doc. No. CEP-950162.

A Polish think-tank has argued that despite the hopes of some Georgians that NATO would mediate during the Russia-Georgia conflict, Russia was opposed to any NATO involvement in the region. Instead, NATO strongly condemned Russia's actions, which may have convinced Moscow to end hostilities short of deposing Saakashvili, according to the think-tank. It also asserts that "the conflict ... is the principal, though not the only, cause of the significant slowdown in the process of Georgia's and Ukraine's integration with NATO," so that membership is likely set back for years. The conflict heightened doubts among many NATO members about how Georgia's degraded armed forces could contribute to Alliance security, about the trustworthiness of the Georgian leadership, given questions about how the conflict escalated, and about providing Alliance security guarantees to a country with unresolved territorial disputes.³²

U.S. Policy

The former Bush Administration was supportive of Georgia's NATO aspirations. During Saakashvili's July 2006 U.S. visit, President Bush stated that "I believe that NATO would benefit with Georgia being a member of NATO, and I think Georgia would benefit. And there's a way forward through the MAP."³³ The United States urged offering a MAP to Georgia at the September 2006 NATO foreign ministerial meeting, but agreed to NATO opening an "intensified dialogue" with Georgia. The United States also urged the Alliance to invite Georgia to participate in a MAP at the NATO summit in Bucharest in April 2008, but agreed to a pledge for eventual NATO membership for Georgia.

At the December 2008 NATO foreign ministerial meeting, the United States reportedly agreed with a British proposal to not push for a MAP for Georgia, and instead to formulate Annual National Programs for Ukraine and Georgia to assist them in the "significant work left to do" in meeting the requirements for NATO membership. The United States took the position that the two countries might work toward Alliance membership without formally undertaking MAPs but still carrying out the requirements of MAPs. However, some other members reportedly disagreed with this stance, and the final communique reflected a compromise that the Annual National Programs are undertaken "without prejudice to further decisions which must be taken about MAP."³⁴

At a meeting of the NATO-Georgia Commission in February 2009, U.S. Defense Secretary Gates stressed that the United States has "a continuing security relationship with Georgia. We're involved in training. We are involved in military reform in Georgia. So this is an ongoing relationship and it is a relationship that we are pursuing, both bilaterally and within the

³² Marek Madej, "NATO after the Georgian Conflict: A New Course or Business as Usual?" Polish Institute of International Affairs, January 2009.

³³ The White House. President Bush and Georgian President Saakashvili: Remarks to the Press following meeting at the White House, July 5, 2006.

³⁴ NATO. *Final Communiqué: Meeting of the North Atlantic Council at the level of Foreign Ministers*, Press Release (2008)153, December 3, 2008. According to former Secretary Rice, how Georgia attained NATO membership, and "what mechanisms are used – we believe that the NATO-Georgia Commission [can] intensify our dialogue and our activities with Georgia and NATO. And therefore, there does not need at this point in time to be any discussion of MAP.... It really is just a question of how we would execute the Bucharest decision. It is not a change in policy." U.S. Department of State. *Remarks on the NATO Foreign Ministers Meeting*, November 26, 2008. A NATO factsheet, however, asserts that "future decisions on when Georgia will move to the MAP stage and eventually to membership will be based on Georgia's performance in implementing key reforms laid out in the IPAP." *NATO's relations with Georgia*, at <http://www.nato.int/issues/nato-georgia/index.html>.

framework of our NATO allies. He appeared to endorse exploring improved NATO ties with Russia, but urged a cautious approach, averring that the Obama Administration “has not yet looked comprehensively at its policies with respect to Russia, and so I think our position on that [on resuming NATO-Russia Council meetings], on [when] that ought to happen, is not yet settled.”³⁵

At the NATO foreign ministers’ meeting in early March 2009, Secretary of State Clinton stressed that the renewal of dialogue in the NATO-Russia Council did not spell any less commitment by NATO for eventual Alliance membership for Georgian and Ukraine. In associated meetings of the NATO-Georgia and NATO-Ukraine commissions, she “reiterated ... the United States’ firm commitment to each of those nations moving toward NATO membership and our equally strong commitment to work with them along with NATO to make clear that they should not be the subject of Russian intimidation or aggression. But I think ... there are benefits to reenergizing the NATO-Russia Council.... I don’t think you punish Russia by stopping conversations with them about ... the failure to comply with the requirements set forth by the OSCE and others concerning their actions in Georgia.”³⁶

The U.S.-Georgia Charter

Ongoing U.S. Support for Georgia’s sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity was reflected in the U.S.-Georgia Charter on Strategic Partnership, signed in January 2009, which states that “our two countries share a vital interest in a strong, independent, sovereign, unified, and democratic Georgia.” The accord is similar to a U.S.-Ukraine Charter signed in December 2008 and a U.S.-Baltic Charter signed in 1998 with Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. In the latter case, the charter was viewed as a means to help advance the states toward NATO membership.

In the security realm, the U.S.-Georgia Charter states that “the United States and Georgia intend to expand the scope of their ongoing defense and security cooperation programs to defeat [threats to global peace and stability] and to promote peace and stability.” Such cooperation also aims “to strengthen Georgia’s candidacy for NATO membership.” The two sides will work within the NATO-Georgia Commission “to increase interoperability and coordination of capabilities between NATO and Georgia, including via enhanced training and equipment for Georgian forces.”³⁷

Before the signing, Georgian Foreign Minister Grigol Vashadze hailed the accord as a “stepping stone which will bring Georgia to Euro-Atlantic structures, to membership within NATO, and to [the] family of Western and civilized nations.”³⁸ Deputy Assistant Secretary Bryza stressed that the charter does not provide security guarantees to Georgia. He also stated that U.S.-Georgian defense cooperation programs were still being developed.³⁹ According to some observers, the

³⁵ U.S. Department of Defense. Press Availability With Secretary of Defense Robert Gates Following the NATO Meeting, February 20, 2009.

³⁶ U.S. Department of State. Media Availability with Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton after the NATO Meeting, March 5, 2009.

³⁷ U.S. Department of State. *U.S.-Georgia Charter on Strategic Partnership*, January 9, 2009.

³⁸ U.S. Department of State. Signing Ceremony for the United States and Georgia Charter on Strategic Partnership: Secretary Condoleezza Rice Remarks With Georgian Foreign Affairs Minister Grigol Vashadze in the Treaty Room, January 9, 2009.

³⁹ *CEDR*, January 7, 2009, Doc. No. CEP-950092.

Charter aimed to reaffirm the United States' high strategic interest in Georgia's fate, after it had appeared that the United States (and the West) in recent months had acquiesced to increased Russian dominance in the South Caucasus.⁴⁰

While these goals have received support from most policymakers, some observers have called for a re-evaluation of some aspects of U.S. support for Georgia. These critics have argued that many U.S. policymakers have been captivated by Saakashvili's charismatic personality and pledges to democratize and have tended to overlook his bellicosity. They also have suggested that the United States should not have unquestionably backed Georgia's territorial integrity, but should rather have encouraged reconciliation and the consideration of options short of the reintegration of the regions into Georgia.⁴¹

U.S. Congressional Response

Many in Congress have supported Georgia's NATO aspirations. The NATO Freedom Consolidation Act of 2007 (P.L. 110-17; signed into law on April 9, 2007) endorses NATO enlargement and urges NATO to extend a MAP for Georgia. The act also designates Georgia as eligible to receive security assistance under the program established by the NATO Participation Act of 1994 (P.L. 103-447). Following the civil disorder in Georgia in late 2007, the Senate approved S.Res. 391 (Lugar), which stressed Georgia's NATO aspirations and called on the President to urge Georgia to hold a free and fair presidential election. On February 14, 2008, the Senate also approved S.Res. 439 (Lugar) to urge NATO to enter into a MAP with Georgia and Ukraine.⁴² Similar legislation, H.Res. 997 (Wexler), was approved by the House on April 1, 2008. Further indicating Congressional support, a group of six Members led by Senator Joseph Lieberman sent a letter on February 19, 2008, to then-Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice urging her to support a MAP for Georgia and Ukraine "as one of the top foreign policy priorities of the Administration."⁴³ On May 7, 2008, the House approved H.Res. 1166 (Wexler), which endorsed NATO's pledge at its April meeting of eventual membership for Georgia and called for NATO to offer a MAP to Georgia by the end of the year.

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⁴⁰ David J. Smith, "US-Georgia Charter is Historic," Potomac Institute for Policy Studies, January 12, 2009.

⁴¹ Alexander Cooley and Lincoln Mitchell, "No Way to Treat Our Friends: Recasting Recent U.S.-Georgian Relations," *The Washington Quarterly*, January 2009, pp. 27-41; "Georgia-Russia War Discussion between Gordon Hahn and Johnson's Russia List," *Russia: Other Points of View*, October 17, 2008, at www.russiaotherpointsofview.com.

⁴² Congressional Record, January 31, 2008, pp. S550-S551.

⁴³ States News Service, February 20, 2008.